



Public Safety Committee

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Universal Background Checks for Gun Owners

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Position Statement

The Iowa Youth Congress supports legislation that mandates universal background checks for all gun owners.

Position

The Iowa Youth Congress supports the passage of comprehensive, universal background checks for all gun buyers. With this position, we are proposing a statewide law requiring background checks before any firearm is sold and transferred to another owner. These background checks would incorporate a standardized and comprehensive examination of an individual's criminal records to guarantee that the potential purchaser is a law-abiding and responsible citizen. The individual would be disqualified if he or she has a history of violence and drug abuse. This potential law would add on to the current Iowa code Chapter XVI, within Chapter 724 regarding weapons to add a section regarding background checks for all sales and transfers, making the law considerably stricter to guarantee the safety of all citizens of Iowa, young and old.

Current Situation

Federal law currently compels federally licensed firearms dealers, but not unlicensed sellers, to complete background checks on buyers. Iowa monitors purchases by forbidding private sellers from selling to people who do not have the proper permits/licenses, which they acquire as a result of background checks. Iowa only requires background checks for handgun purchasers, instead of all firearm purchasers. Private sales often are unrestricted, in fact a 2017 study shows "22% of gun owners who reported obtaining their most recent firearm within the previous 2 years reported doing so without a background check." (Miller, Hepburn, and Azrael 2017 p.1).

Iowa is known to be a state with fewer gun deaths than most, but the amount is still high according to Everytown Research "in an average year 264 people die by guns in Iowa.... Iowa had the 43rd highest rate of gun deaths in the United States" (Everytown Research, 2019 p1). Currently in Iowa handguns are regulated with background checks for both private and licensed sellers, but long guns are not. Long guns are defined as "a handheld firearm with a long barrel, as a rifle, designed to be fired when braced against the shoulder" according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary. From 2007 to 2016, at least 43 percent of Iowa's domestic violence gun homicides of women were committed with long guns, which under Iowa law is unprotected from background checks (Vargas and Sinovic, 2018)

Rationale

39,773 people died in 2017 via firearms (Gramlich, 2019), the time to enact legislation is now. By achieving universal background checks into state legislation, Iowa can make strides towards the safe selling and purchasing of guns. The Iowa Youth Congress's approval of this modification in legislation is crucial as it directly affects the youth of our generation. Today's youth have the capacity and ability to prompt waves of change in our state and country concerning gun legislation. Calling for reform and stricter background checks will instill confidence in the younger generations as they have faced more school shootings than generations before them. With the implementation of comprehensive universal background checks, we can better ensure that firearms in our state remain in the hands of those who have thoroughly completed background checks. Adopting universal background checks for all firearm transactions is not only to help Iowa, but to start a larger conversation across the states.

Action Steps

If supported by Iowa Youth Congress, we request that approval from the state legislature be sought to further Congress' ability to produce and enact legislation regarding gun regulation. Measures would be taken to strengthen and enhance background checks that allow for Iowa citizens to purchase a firearm for personal and recreational usage. The state's constitutional amendment on firearm regulation (HJR 2009) must be taken into consideration, as this proposed measure is subject to strict scrutiny. With approval from the state legislature, Congress will cooperate with local firearm dealers to further background checks in the state of Iowa. This will be done by adding permit requirements to gun shows and ensuring the lawful selling and purchasing of guns by private sellers. The background checks should include more specific screening processes and pay substantial attention to mental health by reviewing a person's request for a firearm permit and obtaining approval from a mental health care professional. Thorough background checks including, but not limited to, mental health screenings, scanning of criminal records, and assessments regarding the medical and drug history of an individual would be introduced. A violent past or a diagnosis of a severe mental health condition paired with a weapon is not a safe combination for any environment. We call for background checks to be a requirement at the point of transfer for any gun sale. Taking care to provide intensive universal background checks for firearms will reduce the long term risk of gun violence in schools and public domains. We anticipate that the state government will have to provide some form of compensation to firearm distributors, and the government might have to apply for a federal block grant to achieve this mission.

Sources

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